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SUBJECT: CHILE'S SWINE FLU RESPONSE -- AIRPORT SCREENING AND
MEDICAL READINESS

REFS: State 41768

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: No human cases of swine flu have been reported in Chile. The Chilean government on April 24 began scanning passengers arriving from Mexico and the U.S. at Santiago's International Airport, for fevers using non-invasive fever detectors. Consul General observed the screening process and characterized it as organized and professional. According to the Ministry of Health, suspected cases of swine flu will be transferred to a local hospital for further virological screening and observation. The GOC also recommended Chileans not travel to Mexico and the U.S. Embassy Santiago established a Swine Flu Working Group (SFWG) to coordinate post's information dissemination and response to the health threat. End summary.

National Health Emergency Committee Activated

¶12. (U) In reaction to the World Health Organization (WHO) warning of an outbreak of swine influenza in the U.S. and Mexico, Chile's Ministry of Health on April 23 activated the National Committee for Emergency Response to Outbreak and Disease. According to Ministry of Health officials, Chile has adapted its national preparedness plan for pandemic influenza, which outlines strategic measures for health care personnel and the general population, to the current situation.

No Confirmed Swine Flu Cases in Chile

¶13. (U) There are no confirmed human cases of swine flu reported in Chile and the Chileans have used clinical testing to rule out several cases of concern. The Ministry of Health reported on April 24 that there were three unconfirmed cases of flu under clinical review in Chile. Minister of Health Alvaro Erazo reported on April 26 that two of the three cases had undergone two virological diagnostic tests (IFI and PCR) with negative results. According to Erazo, the third patient had negative PCR results and was awaiting further test results.

Airport Fever Scanning: Organized and Professional

¶14. (U) The Ministry of Health established on April 24 a "sanitary barrier" for entry into Chile by requiring all travelers from Mexico

and United States be evaluated at the International Airport Arturo Merino Benitez, using a thermal fever scanner. The GOC also stated that all travelers from affected areas showing symptoms of respiratory illness, such as fever, muscle aches, headaches, etc., will be immediately transferred for evaluation from the airport to the Hospital del Torax, in the case of adults or the Calvo Mackenna Hospital, in the case of children.

¶15. (U) On April 28, CG Chris Bendsen visited Santiago's airport and observed health officials screening passengers arriving from Mexico City. He characterized the operation as "very organized and professional." Health officials told him about ten flights per day are being checked and they have screened approximately 3000 passengers since April 24. [Note: Total domestic and international arrivals at the airport are around 8000 passengers per day. End note.] The Chilean authorities explained that the current screening process was originally developed in response to concerns about avian flu. Bendsen noted Health Ministry officials were very cooperative but exhausted; six to ten staff are now working in eight hour shifts, but some staff worked longer hours over the weekend.

¶16. (U) Travelers on flights from Mexico and the U.S., including crew, complete a declaration and are screened using a thermal fever scanner (reportedly one of the only such scanners in use in Latin America). The passengers wait in the dedicated arrival lounge until every passenger has been screened. The process for about 200 people arriving from Mexico took about 40 minutes. Officials noted that passengers arriving from Mexico are also screened before departing Mexico. Bendsen observed that about a third to half of arriving passengers were wearing surgical masks and all of the health officials and airport staff were wearing masks and some wore

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surgical gloves.

Airport Procedures For Suspect Cases

¶17. (U) Passengers who test positive for a fever are referred to a medical station where their temperature is taken with an ear thermometer and a doctor takes their medical history. No passengers on the observed Mexico flight were referred to the medical station. Since the screening began, 22 passengers have passed through the medical station but no one has been transferred to the designated government hospitals.

¶18. (U) In the event that a suspect case is identified, all passengers on the flight will be given a detailed briefing of symptoms and how to inform the Health Ministry in the event of possible illness. The declaration asks for detailed information about each passenger's planned whereabouts for the following seven days.

GOC Distributing Antivirals

¶19. (U) The National Committee revealed on April 24 that the country's stock of antivirals was being distributed to health centers. These doses are in addition to the 36,000 treatments already distributed to centers in anticipation of a possible avian flu pandemic.

GOC Disseminating Public Health Information

¶10. (U) Media coverage throughout the weekend focused on the swine flu alert, repeating messages to remain calm and take basic precautions, such as hand-washing. In addition, the Ministry of Health's website issued recommendations similar to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, and it warns travelers to "avoid visiting places affected to date (Mexico, United States)." The website provided the following public information resources:

Health Responses: (+56) 600-360-7777
Ministry of Health: www.minsal.cl; www.pandemia.cl
World Health Organization: www.who.int/es

Embassy Swine Flu Working Group Taking Action

¶11. (SBU) Post established an Embassy Swine Flu Working Group (SFWG) composed of DCM, E/POL, MGMT, PA, FAS, MED/Health Unit and CONS representatives. On April 27, the SFWG met and decided to take the following measures:

- (a) Place on the Embassy web site Centers for Disease Control (CDC) information about swine flu with recommendations in both English and Spanish (Action: PA);
- (b) Send an Embassy-wide email with information from MED and CDC on how to take precautions (Action: MGMT, Health Unit);
- (c) Send same preventative information on swine flu to all Wardens (Action: CONS);
- (d) Visit airport to consult and view measures the GOC is taking there to prevent spread of swine flu, including temperature screening of passengers on some arriving flights (Action: CONS);
- (e) Consult with Health Ministry, specifically Under Secretary Jeanette Vega, about measures the GOC is taking (Action: FAS, EPOL);
- (f) Inventory medications and supplies and personal protective gear, e.g., mask, gloves, gowns (Action: Health Unit);
- (g) Check status of U.S. Armed Service visitor who arrived in country with flu symptoms on Thursday, April 23, and was directed to a local health clinic for appropriate testing and treatment (Action: Health Unit).

¶12. (SBU) All of these actions have been completed except for the meeting with the Ministry of Health, which will take place late on April 28 and reported septel. The visitor who arrived on April 23 tested negative for swine flu.

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¶13. (SBU) The SFWG will meet daily as long as the situation warrants.

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